Examining social support, spirituality, gratitude, and their associations with happiness through self-acceptance

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Abstract: Happiness is something that every individual yearns for, so an understanding of the factors that influence it is needed. This study aims to test the influence model of social support, spirituality, and gratitude on happiness through self-acceptance. Data collection using the scale of social support, spirituality, gratitude, self-acceptance, and happiness, with a sample of 790 Indonesian students. The data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis. The structural model showed acceptable goodness of fit. Self-acceptance was demonstrated to significantly serve as a mediating variable in social support, spirituality, and gratitude in relation to happiness. In addition, social support (β = .112, p < .01), gratitude (β = .256, p < .01), spirituality (β = .431, p < .01), and self-acceptance (β = .364, p < .01) had significant positive relationships with happiness. The study has important implications globally for characteristics such as the sample used, especially with regard to the self-acceptance and happiness of university students.

Keywords: gratitude; happiness; self-acceptance; social support; spirituality; structural equation modeling

Abstrak: Setiap individu mendambakan kebahagiaan, sehingga diperlukan pemahaman tentang faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi kebahagiaan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menguji model pengaruh dukungan sosial, spiritualitas, dan kebersyukuran terhadap kebahagiaan melalui penerimaan diri. Pengumpulan data menggunakan skala dukungan sosial, spiritualitas, kebersyukuran, penerimaan diri, dan kebahagiaan, dengan sampel mahasiswa se-Indonesia sebanyak 790 mahasiswa. Data dianalisis menggunakan *Structural Equation Modeling* (SEM) *analysis*. Model struktural dalam penelitian ini menunjukkan *goodness of fit* yang dapat diterima. Penerimaan diri secara signifikan berperan sebagai variabel mediasi untuk dukungan sosial, spiritualitas, dan kebersyukuran dalam hubungannya dengan kebahagiaan. Selain itu dukungan sosial (β = 0,112, p < 0,01), kebersyukuran (β = 0,256, p < 0,01), spiritualitas (β = 0,431, p < 0,01), dan penerimaan diri (β = 0,364, p < 0,01) memiliki hubungan positif signifikan dengan kebahagiaan. Penelitian ini memiliki implikasi penting secara global untuk karakteristik seperti sampel yang digunakan, terutama yang berkaitan dengan penerimaan diri dan kebahagiaan mahasiswa.

Kata Kunci: kebersyukuran; kebahagiaan; penerimaan diri; dukungan sosial; spiritualitas; *structural equation modeling*

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Introduction

Happiness is something that individuals seek in their lives. This is in line with Grant and McGhee's (2021) opinion that everyone wants to be happy. There is probably no greater life goal than the desire to feel happiness. Ng (2022) also states that happiness is the most important wish for most people.

Happiness is often defined as an individual's positive assessment of their overall quality of life. In other words, happiness is a condition related to individuals' feeling of a sense of satisfaction with their lives compared to other feelings (Veenhoven, 2015). The definition shows that happiness consists of several main factors. First, it concerns satisfaction or pleasure and unpleasant feelings. Someone is happy if they experience such feelings. Second, happiness is a personal rather than a collective condition, so it is subjective. Therefore, no one standard can be used to determine the level of happiness. Third, happiness is an assessment individuals make of their overall lives, not just in one particular phase or period.

As happiness is personal or subjective, each individual's degree of happiness differs from that of others (Veenhoven, 2015). Some may feel that they in their situation they are happy, whereas others may feel otherwise. This result difference occurs because the assessment of happiness is subjective in every individual. Each individual's standard of happiness differs, but all should be able to feel a sense of happiness in their life. According to Ng (2022), happiness is a pleasant feeling; where the positive affect felt greater than the negative ones, measured by the intensity and period of time, so that throughout life, happiness will be felt the most.

However, achieving happiness is not easy for some people. The difficulty in obtaining happiness can trigger people, including students, to perform various negative actions that can be life-threatening, such as suicide. Research on 4,675 undergraduate students from Cambodia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia, aged 18-23, included 231 respondents from Yogyakarta, found that, 6.9% among them had suicidal thoughts (Peltzer et al., 2017). In addition, Indonesia ranks second in suicide as the cause of death for young people between the ages of 15 and 29 (Susilawati, 2018). Research by Idham et al. (2020) on suicide attempts by Indonesian university students showed that 58.1% of respondents had high suicidal thoughts and attempts. Furthermore, a survey was conducted in 2019 on first semester college students in Bandung City. The results found that 30.5% were depressed, 20% had serious thoughts of suicide, and 6% had attempted suicide, such as cutting themselves, jumping from a height, or hanging themselves (Susanti, 2019).

Research conducted by Li et al. (2021) on adolescent suicidal behavior in 46 countries showed that 4.5% of Indonesian respondents had had suicidal thoughts, 5.3% had suicide plans, and 3.1% had attempted suicide. Similarly, research by Smith et al. (2021) on suicide attempts in adolescents aged 12-15 showed that 2.3% of Indonesian respondents had attempted suicide once. On the other hand, research by Eskin et al. (2021) showed that 31.8% of university students in Indonesia had suicidal thoughts, and 12.6% had attempted suicide.

These various research results are a sign that some students are unhappy. The suicidal thought may emerge as a result from inability to accept the conditions they are facing. Accepting one's situation is one of the keys to achieving happiness. Hurlock (2004) and Su et al. (2019) state that self-acceptance is a factor that can affect one's happiness. It is defined as a positive sense of oneself as a whole, including accepting past experiences that are not influenced by self-achievement, and not considering other people's opinions (Ellis, 2005).

The University of Hertfordshire (2014) revealed that happiness is not just a matter of feelings, but something that can be achieved through small habits in everyday life. However, some people have more simple habits that make them happier than others, including one habit that must be practiced to feel happiness, which is the ability to accept oneself.

Besides self-acceptance, social support can also influence happiness (Ahmadi et al., 2019; Moeini et al., 2018). Huang et al. (2020) state that the subjective well-being can increase if social and emotional development of adolescents, including students, is strengthened by social support. Social support has also contributes students' adaptability to the conditions and problems they face and make them resilient (Bukhori et al., 2017; Huang et al., 2021; Maisyarah, 2015; Mufidah, 2017). There are three sources of social support for individuals: friends, family, and significant others (Zimet et al., 1988). Social support will help individuals maintain behavioral stability to gain comfort feelings, and develop positive attitudes. Support from others will allow individuals to accept and appreciate themselves (Hill et al., 2015).

As found by Subari (2017), spirituality also influences happiness. Wahidin's research shows that the stronger a person's spirituality, the higher their happiness level. The term 'spirituality', referring to an individual's belief in God as a transcendent force that is part of religion, is often used interchangeably with the term's 'religiosity' and 'religion'. Spirituality influences students' subjective well-being (Arung & Aditya, 2021; Villani et al., 2019), which is a term often used interchangeably with happiness. Students with high spirituality will feel prosperous, allowing them to cope with problems or difficulties (Kim & Esquivel, 2011).

Another factor that affects happiness is gratitude (Anabella, 2022; Khairullah et al., 2021;

Prabowo & Laksmiwati, 2020). Gratitude can help them overcome problems faced as well as a protective factor that can improve well-being, thus leading to a sense of happiness (Daulay et al., 2022). Individuals can achieve happiness because they are grateful and appreciate life. Gratitude is related to one's appreciation for the help and good deeds of others (Kwok et al., 2022).

Based on the discussion above, it can be seen that previous studies show that all the factors that affect happiness also have a relationship with self-acceptance. For example, some studies show that social support correlates with self-acceptance (Marni & Yuniawati, 2015). Likewise, gratitude (Watkins, 2014) and spirituality (Padoli, 2018) also correlate with it.

However, most of the above studies only focus on the effect of one variable on happiness, with independent variables tested separately. As they have not been tested at the same time, there remains a gap because the research does not answer comprehensively and simultaneously what factors affect happiness. In addition, previous studies have not examined how self-acceptance can mediate between social support, spirituality, and gratitude and happiness.

This study therefore aims to examine the direct and indirect effects of each variable simultaneously. The intention is to simultaneously test the effect of social support, spirituality, and gratitude on students' happiness through self-acceptance both directly or indirectly. These are internal factors, while social support is an external factor that affects happiness.

The study hypotheses are as follows:

Main hypothesis: There is a link between the theoretical model and the empirical data of the influence of social support, spirituality, and gratitude on happiness, directly or indirectly mediated by self-acceptance.

Sub-hypotheses: a) Social support has a direct or indirect effect on happiness through self-acceptance; b) Spirituality has a direct or indirect effect on happiness through self-acceptance; c) Gratitude has a direct or indirect effect on happiness through self-acceptance.

Methods

Research Design

A quantitative approach was employed, with happiness as the dependent variable. The independent variables are social support, spirituality and gratitude. In addition, self-acceptance is a mediating variable that connects the independent and dependent variables. Therefore, the self-acceptance acts as the dependent variable for social support, spirituality, and gratitude, while also functioning as the independent variable for happiness.

Participants

The participants were male and female Indonesian students at undergraduate level in the age range of 18 to 28. A total of 800 participants completed the research scales. However, some had to be dropped because they did not meet the criteria, so only 790 participants' data could be used for the research analysis.

Procedure

The data collection was made using the non-random sampling technique in the form of convenience sampling. This technique was chosen because of the vast Indonesian territory, so it will be more challenging to use probability sampling technique.

The data were collected in October 2022 using research scales. Participants were selected using shared online tools (google forms). At the beginning of the research scale, an informed consent statement was included that briefly explained the research aims. If the participant agreed with the informed consent, they were asked to complete the variable measurement tool.

Instrument and Measure

Five scales were used in the study, namely the social support scale, spirituality scale, gratitude scale, self-acceptance scale, and happiness scale. The social support, spirituality, and gratitude scales were adapted from English into Indonesian, so a translation process needed to be undertaken in the adaptation process. The steps taken in this process were: 1) forward translation, 2) synthesis translation, 3) back-translation, 4) expert judgement, and 5) a readability test. The self-acceptance and happiness scales were adapted into Indonesian by previous researchers, so that they could be used directly to collect data.

Social Support Scale

An adaptation of perceived social support scale developed by Zimet et al. (1988) to measure subjective assessments of social support from family, friends, and significant others was employed. The scale consists of 12 items, rated using a 7-point scale.

Spirituality Scale

Spirituality was measured using an adaptation of the spirituality scale developed by Davis et al. (2015), which consists of 18 items rated using a 5-point scale.

Gratitude Scale

Gratitude was measured using an adaptation of the gratitude questionnaire developed by McCullough et al. (2002). This scale consists of 6 items rated using a 7-point scale.

Self-acceptance Scale

Self-acceptance was measured using a modified self-acceptance sub-scale of the psychological well-being scale compiled by (Ryff, 1989). The scale was adapted to Indonesian by

Fadhil (2021). It consists of seven items assessed on a 6-point scale. The scale was modified by adding two items, meaning the version used consisted of nine items. This addition aimed to increase reliability (from α = 0.77 to α = 0.81) and complete the construction of measuring self-acceptance.

Happiness Scale

Happiness in this study was measured using an adaptation of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire compiled by Hills and Argyle (2002) and adapted into Indonesian by (Marliani et al., 2019). The scale consists of 29 items that are rated using a 6-point scale.

Reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha (α), with α greater than 0.70 indicating acceptable reliability Romero-García et al. (2022). The results of the reliability testing for each variable can be seen in Table 1. Validity was assessed by conducting confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), a prerequisite for structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis. According to Alamer and Lee

(2019), CFA is an advanced statistical method that uses correlation analysis as input to build a structural model to establish structural relationships between observed latent variables. The results of the correlation analysis described in Table 2.

Data Analysis

The research began by testing the reliability, validity, and goodness of fit of the observed data. In addition, structural equation modeling (SEM) was performed to analyze the relationship between the latent variables (variables that cannot be measured directly). SEM modeling is generally employed in measurement and structural models (Rivera et al., 2018). The Sobel test was also conducted to determine the significance of the indirect effect by testing whether it was influenced by the mediating variable, which is an intermediate variable that can mediate the relationship between the independent and dependent variables (Sobel, 1982).

Table 1

Reliability

A	Self-Acceptance	Social Support	Gratitude	Spirituality	Happiness
	.81	.79	.81	.83	.73

Table 2

Correlation

	Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1	Self-Acceptance	1				
2	Social Support	.733**	1			
3	Gratitude	.341**	.462**	1		
4	Spirituality	.974**	.741**	.312**	1	
5	Happiness	.282**	.273**	.372**	.261**	1

Notes: **Significant correlation at the .01 level

The measurement model aims to convert the indicators developed on latent variables; in this case, its development was based on the theoretical justification of the latent variable. The structural model displays the relationships that form or explain the causality between latent variables. SEM has the same function as multiple regression modeling. However, SEM is more powerful as it considers interactions, non-linearity, correlated independent variables, measurement errors, correlated error terms, and multiple latent independent variables, each of which is measured by several indicators based on theoretical justification (Gunduz & Elsherbeny, 2020; Karim et al., 2020).

Results

This section analyzes the data by filtering for missing data, outliers, reliability and normality. The results of the initial descriptive analysis showed that no outlier data were detected. In addition, all constructs showed acceptable reliability scores, and all skewness and kurtosis values were within the range of -1 to +1. Furthermore, as a prerequisite, correlation analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between the variables of interest in the study. As can be seen in Table 1, the results indicate that all the variables were correlated with each other (p < .01).

To assess the validity of the structural model, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted, which is one of the prerequisites for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis. According to Alamer and Lee (2019), CFA is an advanced statistical technique that uses correlations as inputs to build structural models aimed at establishing structural relationships between latent constructs and underlying observed variables. The quality of measurement and structural models is assessed using chi-square ($\chi2$) and norm2 ($\chi2/df$) statistics, together with several goodnesses of fit indices used in CFA and

SEM (Hair et al., 2019), such as the goodness of fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), normed fit index (NFI), root-mean-square error approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR). It is suggested that a $\chi2$ lower than two is considered good (Tabachnick et al., 2007), while values greater than .90 for GFI, NFI, and CFI are considered acceptable, and ones greater than .95 considered to be a good fit (Hair et al., 2019). Conversely, RMSEA and SRMR values lower than .08 indicate good model fit (Hair et al., 2010).

After the CFA, path analysis was run to examine the interrelationships between self-acceptance, social support, gratitude, spirituality, and happiness. According to Fan et al. (2016), path analysis is an SEM method that aims to find causal relationships between variables through mediation; that is, by assessing whether a variable directly or indirectly affects an outcome through another variable. Furthermore, for the structural model, the goodness of fit index shown in Table 3 indicates that the model fits well with the data. Therefore, the structural model of this study supports the relationship between the social support, gratitude, and spirituality variables and self-acceptance.

The coefficient values of the relationship between the variables shown in Table 4 indicate significant direct paths for all those studied, ranging from social support to self-acceptance (β = .112); gratitude to self-acceptance (β = .256); spirituality to self-acceptance (β = .431); self-acceptance to happiness (β = .364); social support to happiness (β = .453); gratitude to happiness (β = .478); and spirituality to happiness (β = .414). In addition, it can be seen that spirituality has the strongest relationship and influence on self-acceptance, as indicated by the regression coefficient value of .431. Gratitude has the strongest relationship with and influence on happiness, as shown by the regression coefficient value of .478.

Table 3

Goodness of Fit for the Final Structural Model

Model	χ^2	p	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	CFI	RMSEA
	4.61	.211	1.57	.93	.96	.99	.03

Figure 3

Structural Model in the Form of a Path Diagram
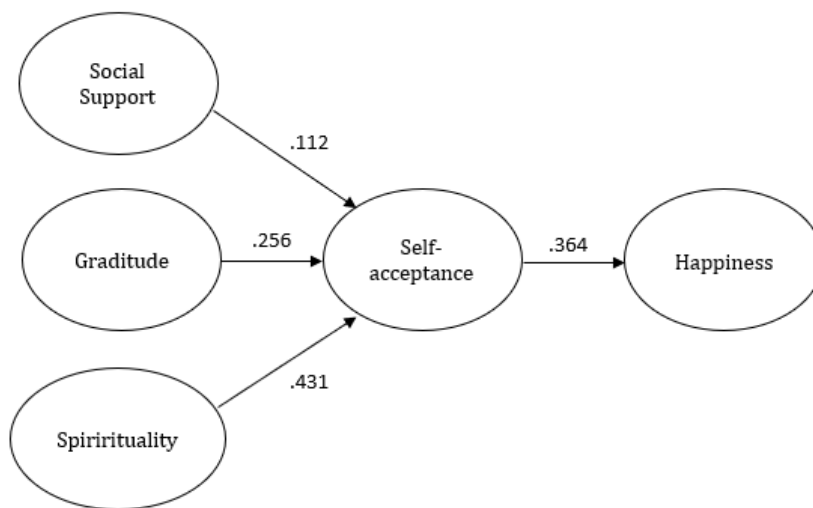
The results of the data analysis show that all the study hypotheses are accepted, as based on the structural model estimation results obtained from the data analysis results. In Table 4, it can be seen that the parameters of the social support variable show a positive relationship and have a significant effect on self-acceptance. The stronger the social support, the better the self-acceptance, with the effect level of .113.

Parameter estimates on the gratitude variable show a positive relationship and significantly affect self-acceptance; the stronger the gratitude, the better the self-acceptance, with the level of the effect on .256. Parameters on the spirituality variable show a positive relationship and significantly affect self-acceptance; the stronger the spirituality, the better the self-acceptance, with the level of the effect is at .431.

Parameters on the self-acceptance variable show a positive relationship and also significantly affect happiness. The stronger one's self-acceptance, the happier one will be, with an effect size of .364. This finding shows that happy individuals accept the condition of their lives and rarely feel unpleasant emotions such as sadness or anger.

Table 5 shows the results of the mediation testing to determine the significance of the mediating effects of social support, gratitude and spirituality on happiness through self-acceptance. The Sobel test results confirm the mediating effect of self-acceptance (Sobel test statistics = 1.266,

p < .05) in the relationship between social support and happiness. Self-acceptance (Sobel test statistics = 1. 425, p < .05) mediates the relationship between gratitude and happiness, and self-acceptance (Sobel test statistics = 1. 326, p < .05) mediates the relationship between spirituality and happiness. These results prove the hypothesis that social support influences happiness indirectly through self-acceptance. That is, self-acceptance mediates the relationship between social support and happiness, while gratitude affects happiness indirectly through self-acceptance. Therefore, self-acceptance mediates the relationship between gratitude and happiness. Spirituality influences happiness indirectly through self-acceptance. Therefore, self-acceptance mediates the relationship between spirituality and happiness.

Discussion

The structural model estimation results shown in Table 4 indicate that social support, gratitude, spirituality and self-acceptance perform a positive and significant relationship with happiness. Furthermore, there is also a role played by social support, gratitude and spirituality in happiness mediated by self-acceptance, as shown in Table 5. Social support, gratitude and spirituality affect happiness directly and indirectly.

The results of the analysis indicate a relationship between self-acceptance and happiness. This is in line with Khairuddin and Mahmud's (2020) research, which found that self-acceptance is one of the strongest predictors of happiness, with a contribution of 10%. It is also in line with the research of Galanakis et al. (2020)

Table 4

Estimation of the Structural Model

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	β	SE	Bootstrapping 95% BC confidence interval	
				Lower	Upper
Social Support	Self-Acceptance	.112**	.042	.022	.205
Gratitude	Self-Acceptance	.256**	.025	.042	.573
Spirituality	Self-Acceptance	.431**	.126	.183	.695
Self-Acceptance	Happiness	.364**	.253	.176	.538
Social Support	Happiness	.453**	.187	.190	.592
Gratitude	Happiness	.478**	.191	.119	.511
Spirituality	Happiness	.414**	.175	.253	.529

Note: n = 790; **p < .01; β = regression coefficient, SE = standard error, BC = bias corrected

Table 5

Testing for mediation

Mediation Model	Sobel Test
Social support, self-acceptance, happiness	1.266*
Gratitude, self-acceptance, happiness	1.425*
Spirituality, self-acceptance, happiness	1.326*

Notes: *p < .05

that found that happiness is the result of self-acceptance.

It means that people with good self-acceptance will feel a more positive feeling. In line with this, Lu et al. (2022) found that self-acceptance can improve mental health by promoting positive coping strategies. It is a positive feeling towards oneself as a whole, including the acceptance of past experiences that are not influenced by self-achievement nor the opinions of others (Ellis, 2005). The existence of self-acceptance will mean individuals experience more positive feelings and are protected from negative ones. Consequently, they will feel happiness more easily.

The analysis results also show the role of social support in happiness. This can be a protective factor for those facing problems. Therefore, someone with strong social support will tend to have feel positive emotions during difficult times and overall feel happier (Y. Huang et al., 2020).

In social science studies, involvement in a social community positively influences individuals' self-acceptance. Such positive social support in the community can help individuals feel more positive in giving meaning to their lives. Through this support, they can self-actualize in their environment, and the enthusiasm to continue such actualization can their increase emotional maturity and openness (Habibah & Sucipto, 2020; Himawanti et al., 2020).

Kim et al. (2021) found that social support in the form of social activities, emotional support, information support, and affection support can be associated with happiness. It is in line with other studies that found an association between social support and happiness (Findler et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2021). It can therefore be stated that someone with strong social support will tend to feel happier than someone with lower support.

It was also found that social support plays a role in self-acceptance. This is in line with Lavasani et al. (2011) research, which demonstrates that strong social support is associated with good self-acceptance in individuals. At the same track, research by Emadpoor et al. (2016) also found that social support has a significant positive relationship with self-acceptance. In such support, individuals will tend to accept themselves more, so will feel more positive emotions when experiencing problems (Huang et al., 2020). Therefore, social support can affect happiness through self-acceptance.

Another finding in this study supports the association between gratitude and happiness. Gratitude can increase a person's positive effect, which then makes them happier (Hwang et al., 2015). This is in line with other research, which has found that gratitude is more strongly associated with positive rather than negative effects Hence, a feeling of gratitude is more closely associated with happiness than a lack of it being associated with the inability to adjust (Portocarrero et al., 2020). Other studies have also shown a relationship between gratitude and happiness (David et al., 2022; Mahipalan & Sheena, 2019b). It can thus be said that those with a high sense of gratitude will tend to also have a higher level of happiness.

Gratitude also contributes to self-acceptance. Those who feel gratitude will tend to be more able to accept themselves. This is in accordance with the research of Wood et al. (2009), which shows that gratitude is a predictor of self-acceptance. With gratitude, people will have more awareness of themselves, leading to higher self-acceptance (Voci et al., 2019), which can make them happy (Khairuddin & Mahmud, 2020). Therefore, it can be said that gratitude influences happiness through self-acceptance.

Furthermore, there is an association between spirituality and happiness. This finding follows

those of previous studies, which have shown a similar relationship (Amiruddin et al., 2021; David et al., 2022; Mahipalan & Sheena, 2019a). Spirituality in a person can be associated with positive life functioning (Moal-Ulvoas, 2017). Consequently, spirituality can increase a person's happiness through their perceived meaning of life. In addition, spirituality can reduce negative effects and increase positive ones in individuals (Levenson et al., 2006), implying that those with strong spirituality will feel positive emotions more easily than negative ones. Spirituality can also be associated with forgiveness (Leach & Lark, 2004). Based on this discussion, it can be said that those with spiritual tendencies will feel positive effects more easily and be more protected from negative ones. Therefore, people with high spirituality will tend to be happier.

The results of the analysis also show the role of spirituality in self-acceptance. This finding is in line with Mahipalan and Sheena's (2019b) research, which found that spirituality can lead to higher self-acceptance. Similarly, Ryff (2021) found that spirituality is related to self-acceptance. It can therefore be stated that those with strong spirituality will tend to have better self-acceptance. In other words, spirituality influences happiness through self-acceptance.

Conclusion

The study tested the model of the effect of social support, spirituality and gratitude on happiness through student self-acceptance as a mediating variable. The final model showed a good fit with the research sample data and was aligned with the initial conceptual model, theoretical assumptions, and empirical investigations previously conducted in the field. The study findings have important implications globally for people with characteristics similar to those of the sample, especially concerning self-acceptance behavior and college students' happiness.

The results indicate that self-acceptance significantly acts as a mediating variable in relation to the effect of social support, gratitude and spirituality on happiness. In addition, social support, gratitude, spirituality and self-acceptance have a significant positive relationship with happiness. This means that the stronger one's social support, gratitude, spirituality and self-acceptance, the higher one's level of happiness will be. Social support affects happiness through self-acceptance. This implies that the effect of social support on happiness can be explained by its effect on self-acceptance and by the effect of self-acceptance on happiness. Gratitude affects happiness through self-acceptance. This means that the influence of gratitude on happiness can be explained by its influence on self-acceptance and by the influence of self-acceptance on happiness. Spirituality also affects happiness through self-acceptance, meaning that its influence on happiness can be explained by its influence on self-acceptance and the influence of self-acceptance on happiness. The study has provided some scientific references to strengthen early detection, early intervention, and treatment needed to improve the self-acceptance and happiness among university students.[]

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